New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1954

Volume XV, Number 2 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of January 25, 1954

1954 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1953 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
*Can-Can	304
Charley's Aunt	179
Dead Pigeon	176
End as a Man	250
*Fifth Season (The)	380
*In the Summer House	168
*John Murray Anderson's Almanac	191
*Kind Sir	225
*Kismet	198
Late Love	258
Madam, Will You Walk	201
*Me and Juliet	298
My 3 Angels	334
*Oh, Men! Oh, Women!	184
*Picnic	348
*Prescott Proposals (The)	187
*Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker (The)	165
*Sabrina Fair	217
Sing Till Tomorrow	172
*Solid Gold Cadillac (The)	222
*Tea and Sympathy	266
*Teahouse of the August Moon (The)	254
*Wonderful Town	344

1952 Vol.

*Dial M for Murder	215
*Seven Year Itch (The)	186

1951 Vol.

*King and I (The)	304

1949 Vol.

South Pacific	312

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 25, 1954*

1954 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1954

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
*Caine Mutiny Court Marital (The)	382
*Coriolanus	385
*His and Hers	393
*Mademoiselle Colombe	397
Starcross Story (The)	390

Theatre Openings
"Coriolanus"
"The Caine Mutiny Court Marital"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 25, 1954*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Caine Mutiny Court Martial"

The New York Times
January 21, 1954

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Mr. Wouk's "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial," which opened at the Plymouth last evening, turns out to be as expert as everyone had hoped. Staged and played with the greatest ease and sincerity, it tells a shattering tale softly. For the story of the trapping and destruction of a tyrannous navy captain might easily build into a burst of star-spangled heroics. Like the novel Lieutenant Keefer is writing, "Multitudes, Multitudes," it might swell up with self-righteousness.

But Mr. Wouks' drama style is like his style for "The Caine Mutiny." It avoids purple patches and modestly concentrates on the subject at hand. It differs from the novel only in the artfulness of the craftsmanship. From the casualness of the beginning, you would never suspect that the ordeal of Captain Queeg was going to be so painful and devastating; nor that the winning attorney would repudiate his own methods so violently at the celebration party. As the trial moves along quietly from point to point, it never occurs to you that so much moral principle is at stake.

Like all theatre trials, this one has its dull moments. Getting the exposition nailed down takes quite a long time before the tension rises. And even when the story is well along, there are some soft places here and there. Court ceremony is the enemy of the theatre; it is seldom pure theatre, as many people suppose.

But once the defending attorney upsets the rhythm of the Navy's case against a subordinate officer who took a captain's command away in a typhoon, once the attorney begins to break down the captain's assurance and pokes into the ugliness of his character—Mr. Wouk's drama has some of the unforced inevitability of a tragedy. It is remarkably well-planned and it is written neatly.

* * *

In his velvety style of staging, Charles Laughton has given it the perfect performance. The production is reduced to the essentials. Apart from the judge's bench and a few pieces of furniture, there is no scenery. The curtain is lowered to indicate an intermission; but the curtain is up before the play begins and does not come down when it is over. Having had some very basic experience with concert-style drama, Mr. Laughton is not loading the play down with non-essentials.

There is quite a cast for "The Caine Munity Court Martial," and every actor is in fine fettle. Henry Fonda's talent for underplaying has never been so apposite, or cut so sharply into the veracity of a person. It is the truth of the character of the mournful defending attorney who does not relish his job but never takes it lightly. Relaxed, thoughtful, taciturn; quiet of voice and manner, Mr. Fonda makes a heroic character out of unheroics; and his moral summing up in the final scene is all the more penetrating and shocking because he never exploits it.

* * *

If Mr. Fonda's acting is superb, what is left to describe Lloyd Nolan's masterly performance as the unbalanced ship commander? In the early scenes Mr. Nolan's captain is outwardly cool and assured. But once the defending attorney begins to trap him into damaging admissions, the captain begins to go to pieces, and Mr. Nolan's portrait of fear, desperation and panic is a stunning piece of work, principally because he has every detail of it under control.

John Hodiak's portrait of the accused executive officer has strength, charm and candor and the stamp of a human being. Every stroke in it is genuine and pertinent. And it is difficult to think how the other parts could be improved in the acting. Ainslie Pryor's judge advocate, Russell Hick's presiding officer, the ship officers played by Charles Nolte and Robert Gist, and the learned medical officers played by Stephen Chase and Herbert Anderson are true in every detail. And Eddie Firestone's brief sketch of a rattled signalman is highly amusing. Paul Birch has one pungent scene as an expert on navigation.

* * *

It is all theatre in every detail, and every detail has been calculated by expert theatre men. Those are the qualities that make a good show. But Mr. Wouk's mildly written drama has one other quality. It is sincere. Mr. Wouk is trying to tell the truth. That is the thing that gives it distinction.

"THE CAINE MUTINY COURT MARTIAL"

Play by Herman Wouk, based on his novel "The Caine Mutiny"; staged by Charles Laughton; presented by Paul Gregory at the Plymouth Theatre, January 20, 1954. The cast:

Stenographer.....John Huffman
Orderly.....Greg Roman
Lt. Barney Greenwald.....
Henry Fonda
Lt. Stephen Maryk..John Hodiak
Lt. Cdr. John Challee.....
Ainslie Pryor
Capt. Blakely.....Russell Hicks
Lt. Cdr. Philip Francis Queeg..
Lloyd Nolan
Lt. Thomas Keefer..Robert Gist
Signal 3/C Junius Urban.....
Eddie Firestone
Lt. (j.g.) Willis Keith.....
Charles Nolte
Capt. Randolph Southard.....
Paul Birch
Dr. Forrest Lundeen.....
Stephen Chase
Dr. Bird.....Herbert Anderson

Herald Tribune NEW YORK
January 21, 1954

THEATER

'The Caine Mutiny Court Martial'

By WALTER F. KERR

A Real Broadside

"THE CAINE MUTINY COURT MARTIAL" is a theatrical adventure which builds to a second-act climax of such hair-raising intensity that you are sure nothing, and no one, can ever top it. Some one then proceeds to top it.

Lloyd Nolan and Henry Fonda are the actors who pile tour de force on tour de force in Herman Wouk's shrewd and shattering condensation of the heart of his novel.

* * *

Mr. Nolan is seen as Captain Queeg, that cringing and condescending martinet who has been relieved of his command by Lieutenant Stephen Maryk during the disastrous confusion of a typhoon. As the actor walks, with an insecure jauntiness, before the military tribunal which is to try his subordinate for mutiny, he begins to prepare for his final, blood-curdling effects.

The hollow cheerfulness of his nasal monotone, the mild apprehension with which he licks his lips as he faces a questioner, the overblown generosity of his attempts to be 'fair' are all telltale signs—and brilliantly conceived ones—of the crushing humiliation which is in store for him.

Throughout the evening Mr. Nolan must work cagily against the lines, offering what seem to be casually reasonable statements of fact and at the same time betraying the sick fear which lurks hauntingly behind every word, every affable wave of his hand, every studied crossing of his legs. When it is time for this agonizing interior struggle to stammer and mumble and finally roar its way into the open, the force of the explosion is devastating. Mr. Nolan stiffens into shock on the witness stand; his upper lip stretches taut against his teeth; and he trembles and laughs and rambles and sobs in one of the most naked revelations of character to have stunned Broadway in years. It is a tremendous performance.

The scene is not only profoundly moving, it is exhausting—and you do not expect to be jarred again. But Mr. Wouk's basic poin' has yet to be made. Captain Queeg is an intolerant and intolerable man; but he is no villain. It is the Queegs, the career men—good and bad, lovable and unlovable—who have held the fort while an unprepared nation rushed its college intellectuals and its thick-headed fishermen into training schools at the start of World War II.

* * *

It falls to Henry Fonda to turn the tables, to swing our sympathies from the well meaning but bumbleheaded Maryk to the already destroyed Queeg. In a magnificent end-of-the-evening sequence, Mr. Fonda weaves drunkenly into an acquittal party, his eyes glazed and his speech laboriously thick, to startle not only a bunch of jubilant recruits but all the rest of us as well with a scalding denunciation of easy and short-sighted patriots.

Mr. Fonda is cast as Lt. Barney Greenwald, assigned to defend the rebellious Maryk, and he has passed most of the earlier sequences in shrewd, restless, low-key maneuvers designed to free his man. Now that he has done it, now that he has performed a given duty with all the skill at his command, he is free to reveal his own personal torment. As he offers his broken, stumbling, but heartfelt vision of a nation of Goebbels' getting ready to boil his Jewish mother down to "useful soap," as he pays honor to the role the peacetime Navy has played in staving off that terrifying day, he casts a whole new emotional spell over the theater. We have seen a sick man humiliated, have been horrified and touched: now we are exhilarated by a ringing, rousing, thoroughly intelligible statement in his defense.

* * *

Mr. Wouk's craftsmanship in preparing us for both these experiences has been canny indeed. With the exception of the last few moments, all of the action takes place in San

Francisco courtroom, suggested only by a curved judicial bench, a witness stand, and a background of drapes. The progress of the play is woven through and through a series of interrogations, long question-and-answer bouts that might easily have bogged down into fretful and faraway twice-told tales. As Mr. Wouk has managed it, however, the detail piles up until the images of a typhoon, a beach assault, and the whole comic business of a row over stolen strawberries become vivid, personal, wonderfully present.

* * *

And in the staging, Charles Laughton (succeeding Dick Powell) has infused the minutest movement with tight suspense: an almost imperceptible shift forward on the part of a tribunal, a silent decision by a judge not to question a psychoanalyst. From John Hodiak, as the stubbornly honest but hopelessly bewildered Maryk, comes a performance of compelling and completely ingratiating sincerity. From Stephen Chase, Robert Gist, Eddie Firestone, Charles Nolte and Paul Birch come a whole panel of arresting witnesses, each distinctive, each stunningly clear. Russell Hicks, as President of the Court, and Ainslie Pryor, as attorney for the prosecution, are equally fine.

"The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" is a thrilling achievement.

New York Post

January 21, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

Dramatic Problem of Navy Justice

Out of the most celebrated episode of his triumphant novel about the Navy in wartime, Herman Wouk has constructed a powerful and impressive drama, which he calls, with descriptive completeness, "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial." With Henry Fonda, Lloyd Nolan and John Hodiak giving stalwart performances in the leading roles, it had its first local presentation at the Plymouth Theater last night, where it left little doubt of its entirely justifiable success. Among its theatrical virtues is the interesting one that even those who find themselves arguing with the author at certain points are likely to be among its admirers.

It is in its irony that the tale of Lieut. Stephen Maryk, who is accused of leading a mutiny against his superior officer, Lieut. Commander Queeg during a typhoon in the Pacific, brings up issues that will cause debates over the play, just as I believe they did when they first attracted attention in the novel. A cynic might suggest that, in the conclusion he reaches, Mr. Wouk was indulging in the difficult practice of eating his cake and still holding on to it. What he has done is make a moral pronouncement on mutiny and discipline that is equally important whether you agree with it or not.

Case Against Queeg

For most of the play, Mr. Wouk and his protagonist, the defense attorney in the court martial, make a powerful and overwhelming case against Queeg as a coward, a weakling, an incompetent, a brute and probably a psychiatric case. So impressive is Lieut. Barney Greenwald, the attorney turned flying officer, in his defense of the idealistic young Maryk that even the Naval officers in charge of the court martial are forced to acquit Maryk of the charge of mutiny because the conduct of the commander of the Caine has so clearly proved him unworthy of holding his job. It seems quite a vindication for the accused mutineer.

That, however, is far from the conclusion that the author and his central figure have in mind. All the time that Greenwald was blackening the character of poor Queeg, he was performing an act against which his conscience revolted. I must confess that I am among those who think Queeg deserved to be removed from his command and that the alleged mutiny was entirely justified. But Mr. Wouk disagrees vigorously. At a drunken dinner celebrating the acquittal, Greenwald insists that Maryk, badly advised, was entirely in the wrong, because discipline and its maintenance should be honored and cherished at any cost.

While I still maintain that Greenwald didn't convince me in his rather mystical advocacy of the sacredness of discipline, this, I hasten to add, has nothing to do with the effectiveness of the play. Perhaps it even assists it by adding a stimulating note of controversy to the evening. What is important is the dramatic skill and power with which "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" defends its argument. There is far more pleasure to be derived in the theater from carrying on a personal argument with such an impressive play than there is in agreeing with the sentiments of a less vigorous one.

The all-male cast could hardly have been improved upon. The deceptive simplicity of Mr. Fonda's acting style suits the role of Greenwald splendidly, and the quiet frankness of Mr. Hodiak's manner is equally helpful to the part of Maryk. Few things are more emotionally effective in the theater than the sight of a man cracking up, and Lloyd Nolan takes advantage of such an opportunity to play the unhappy Queeg superbly. In minor assignments, Russell Hicks as the head of the court martial, Ainslee Pryor as the prosecutor, and Paul Birch, Stephen Chase and Herbert Anderson as witnesses are especially good. "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" is provocative and arresting.

DAILY NEWS

January 21, 1954

'The Caine Mutiny Court Martial' A Thrilling Work for the Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Herman Wouk's "The Caine Mutiny" is an absorbing novel—and a long one, with all the vast Central Pacific Ocean in which a writer can have all the room he needs in which to move. Herman Wouk's play, "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial," is almost the opposite—but still the essence—of the book: a taut, terse drama confined, except for one brief scene around a table in a hotel room, to the drab imprisonment of a naval courtroom in San Francisco.

This play, which Paul Gregory presented at the Plymouth Theatre last evening, is called an adaptation of the novel in the program. But it is much more than that. It is a new creation for the theatre, with the theatre and by the theatre—and it is enormously compelling and exciting. It is the modern stage at its best.

Wouk's story is a simple one. A naval lieutenant is on trial for mutiny in wartime, for, during a typhoon in the Pacific, he decided that the skipper of the destroyer-minesweeper Caine was mentally unbalanced, and he seized control of the ship. The trial is a sifting of the evidence through the cold formality of examination and cross-examination of witnesses before a naval court.

Very Quietly Done.

There is scarcely any movement in this play. A witness comes into the room, is sworn, takes a chair, testifies and is dismissed, to make place for another witness. Occasionally the advocate-general (the prosecutor) walks in front of or behind a witness, or over to the high curved bench occupied by the president of the court and six other members of the court. Again, the lawyer for the defense (a naval aviation lieutenant who practiced law in civilian life) will walk in front of a witness or behind him or over to the bench. Once in a while a witness will shrug or wet his lips, and in some of the most exciting moments of the play a witness waves his arms.

Except for these moments, nobody raises his voice. Everybody speaks quietly and with good manners. At the end one man tosses a glass of champagne into another man's face—but this, too, is done quietly, coldly.

Yet "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" is much more thrilling than all of the whooping and jumping of Shakespeare's "Coriolanus." It is written with utmost theatrical skill, it has been directed by Charles Laughton with great theatrical sagacity—and is being acted by just about the best cast anywhere.

Fonda, Nolan Excel.

Henry Fonda, the defense attorney, is giving another of his dry, level and wonderfully artful performances. John Hodiak, the accused mutineer, is likeable and not any brighter than he is supposed to be. Lloyd Nolan, as the skipper whose sanity has been questioned, is a masterly actor, and the first-nighters were compelled to give him an ovation in the middle of a scene.

These three are the principals—but every man in the cast is just as good in his own part, be it large or small. Russell Hicks as the presiding judge; Ainslie Pryor as the prosecutor; Eddie Firestone as a dumb young sailor; Charles Nolte as a smug novelist; Stephen Chase and Herbert Anderson as a pair of navy psychiatrists; Paul Birch and as an old sea dog; Robert Gist as another officer—these make an acting company which is really a company.

My congratulations and my gratitude to everybody from author Wouk down to the six young men who, as judges of the court, never say a word.

Daily Mirror

January 21, 1954

'Caine Mutiny' Provides Magnificent Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Paul Gregory has done it again. Having rewarded playgoers with "Don Juan in Hell" and "John Brown's Body," he is now stirring them with "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial." This is Herman Wouk's remarkable dramatization of sequences from his best-seller "The Caine Mutiny."

IT ARRIVED at the Plymouth Theatre last evening, and held the first-nighters spellbound throughout its two acts. The spell was broken only when the audience broke into spontaneous applause in tribute to perfect performances. And that was frequent, though there are no women in the cast, no love-interest in the drama.

"The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" has to do with a young Navy lieutenant who relieves his captain of command during a typhoon in the Pacific. He believes the skipper ill, because a fellow junior officer has needled him into thinking So. The truth of the mattter is, from the evidence we heard at the Plymouth, that Lt. Cdr. Philip Francis Queeg was temporarily unstable and that Lt. Stephen Maryk was justified in taking over in the emergency.

Lt. Barney Greenwald, World War II Navy flier who had been a brilliant young attorney before entering the service, is appointed to defend Maryk. Greenwald undertakes the assignment reluctantly, for he respects regular officers of the Navy. They are the men who, over the years, have been the backbone of our defense against aggression.

* * *

HIS BEST DEFENSE, he discovers, is to take the offensive. Commander Queeg becomes the defendant, rather than Lt. Meryk. It is heart-breaking to watch the able and clever Greenwald destroy the well-meaning, though petty-minded Queeg. And it is equally heart-breaking to share Greenwald's remorse after he has done his duty.

Fonda plays Greenwald with a simplicity and sincerity that are deeply moving. Lloyd Nolan has great emotional impact as Queeg. And there are outstanding performances by John Hodiak, Ainslie Pryor, Russell Hicks, Robert Gist, Eddie Firestone, Charles Nolte, Paul Birch, Stephen Chase and Herbert Anderson.

The acting is so uniformly admirable that it is difficult and ungracious to single out any member of the company for special citation. Perhaps a unit citation is due them all. Here is exciting acting, ironically humorous acting, that blends into a tremendously effective whole, under the skillful and discerning direction of Charles Laughton and Russell Hicks.

* * *

IF EVER A PRODUCTION proved "the play's the thing," when played to the hilt, this is it. There is no distracting scenery. The courtroom atmosphere is suggested by a gray drape and a few props. But the result is electrifying. The audience is given an opportunity to create its own illusion. Gordon Craig should be delighted!

"The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" is magnificent theatre. It is engrossing from start to finish. It grips your attention like a vise. This superlative event is just the tonic that our Fabulous Invalid needs right now.

So, we suggest that you rush to the Plymouth Theatre box-office immediately, if you hope to see it in the near future. And see it, you must. For this is an arresting, absorbing and completely fascinating evening of theatre.

Journal-American

January 21, 1954

Play and Cast Magnificent

By JOHN McCLAIN

AFTER more than three months of trouping around the country, "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" arrived at the Plymouth Theatre last night and established that it had been well-worth the wait, that it can probably remain here until the performers are honorably retired from the Navy. It is merely a magnificent success.

This is a triumph for Herman Wouk, who adapted his novel with ingenuity and inspiration, and Charles Laughton, who added his abundant talents in aiding Mr. Wouk and in directing and master-minding the proceedings in the weeks of out-of-town touring.

It is also a tribute to an immaculate cast headed by Henry Fonda, John Hodiak and Lloyd Nolan. They make it look easy, but as we all know, such ease is invariably born of infinite blood, sweat and tears.

The play has been spoken of generally as a dramatization from one chapter of Mr. Wouk's best-seller, "The Caine Mutiny," and was even referred to, in earlier reports, as a sort of "reading" similar to "Don Juan in Hell."

It strikes me that neither of these statements is true, for in its present form the important elements of the book are fully covered, even though by indirection, and certainly the production has all the scope of a proper drama.

Here, once again, is exhibited the fundamental fact of playwriting that the audience's mind is superbly inventive. Given the proper words and a good performance and the least imaginative theatre-goer will create his own scenes from the monologue of an actor seated comfortably in center stage. Saves money, too, not having to build all those sets.

Thus the Wouk-Laughton combination has succeeded in recreating within the limits of a Navy Court Martial Room all the months of dissension, suspicion and, finally, desperation that have resulted in the proceedings against Lt. Maryk (John Hodiak), who is accused of mutiny in unlawfully taking command away from his skipper (Lloyd Nolan) aboard a Naval vessel in time of War.

Through the incisive examinations by Lt. Greenwald (Henry Fonda), attorney for Lt. Maryk, we learn of the defections of the captain in time of stress and his Napoleonic neurosis which makes him a petty tyrant incapable of admitting error.

And we come to understand how Maryk, competent and sincere, though insensitive, was led by an intellectual fellow-officer to the final act of taking command of the ship in a moment of extreme emergency.

Basic Issue

In the closing moments the author has carried the play somewhat beyond the limits of his book. Maryk has been acquitted and the skipper has been discredited, and the members of the crew are celebrating. Fonda enters the room, quite drunk, and expresses his own disgust with himself—in order to defend Maryk he had been obliged to attack the captain.

The law of command should prevail; authority in the Navy must be preserved or the defense of the nation will falter and fall.

This basic issue is never resolved, and the controversy will probably range up and down 45th st. for many months to come.

Here is easily the most ambitious part Fonda has handled in his recent stage renaissance, for he is limited in his operations to the immediate orbit of a lawyer, a witness, a judge.

But his support is so solid, the mood so mounting, that by the lift of an eyebrow, the deliberate glance at the judge, or the dreary declaration of "That's all for the defense," he is able to inject explosives into the proceedings.

Lloyd Nolan gives an immense performance as the captain, Queeg, who proceeds from complete self-assurance to virtual collapse during his tortuous minutes on the stand. John Hodiak is assured and believable as the accused.

Fine Support

There are other noteworthy contributions by Ainslie Pryor, as the prosecutor; Russell Hicks, as President of the Court; Robert Gist, as the instigator of all the trouble, and two hilarious interludes by Eddie Firestone, a frightened signalman and Herbert Anderson, a smug junior psychiatrist.

Paul Gregory, as producer, deserves special praise for what, in Navyese, would be called a "taut" production. It is a brilliant addition to this season, and probably serveral more.

New York World-Telegram and The ~~Evening~~ Sun

January 21, 1954

'Caine Mutiny' Anchors on B'way

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" is a brilliantly exciting drama about heroes under stress.

The new wartime play at the Plymouth Theater sneaks up on you, after a quiet start, from a courtroom in view when you enter the theater.

Henry Fonda as an attorney, and John Hodiak as the naval lieutenant on trial, start the action with a deceptively quiet dialogue. They captivate your attention by revealing that the defending attorney would rather prosecute. It is not until the epilogue that you can fully understand his remark.

Hits Like Dynamite.

When you do, the drama's full impact hits like dynamite. You have sided emotionally with the defense straight through, and it has won.

In the play's last speech, you are likely to find your superficial thinking about the case blasted sky high.

Herman Wouk, who dramatized his own novel, has cut the long book to the bone. Every word tells. The endless saga of the voyage is illuminated by reference to its highlights. In the testimony the storm is given just enough technical accuracy to seem real. You can relive the action, as the defendant takes the helm from his commanding officer who is numb with panic.

Dreadful Maelstrom.

The maelstrom of emotion comes when the brilliant attorney leads on the neurotic commander until he is suddenly defending himself, instead of accusing.

Lloyd Nolan plays this sequence unforgettably. The Captain resorts to bluff and vagueness when he is deliberately tripped. Before you know it his control has gone and he is off on a whirling monologue that debases him and ruins his career. The members of the court are so ashamed they cannot watch. The defending lawyer is beyond shame.

Party Episode.

The epilogue is a brief episode at a party celebrating the defendant's victory. It is here the lawyer condemns a clever writer in the crew for leading the defendant on to opposing the captain.

It becomes clear that the defendant need never have taken his drastic action.

The lawyer speaks his mind heart-rendingly, as a Jew, about what might have happened without the regular services, and such men as the one they have ruined.

Fonda Shines.

Henry Fonda can convey more ideas with less sound and movement than any other actor on our stage. Here there are undercurrents that reach you and sway you but are never concretely expressed. He suggests the terrible inner stress, the distaste, the contempt and obligation of a brilliant, dutiful man. His final outburst will leave you speechless.

Lloyd Nolan is extraordinarily astute as the Captain. The turbulent downfall is both horrifying and fascinating to watch. It is obscene self-destruction, and Mr. Nolan plays it without a discordant syllable.

John Hodiak is the technical defendant. It is a less dominant role, but needs careful playing for its balance of obtuseness and earnestness. Mr. Hodiak strikes it exactly, and holds it to the end.

The play is finely cast. Ainslie Pryor is effectively dogged and proper as the prosecutor, and even makes convincing the one moment of the play which is not entirely reasonable. Russell Hicks is dignity and power personified as the president of the court. The tricky egotistical novelist is intelligently portrayed by Robert Gist.

Charles Nolte makes a stalwart witness for the defense, and Eddie Firestone is amusingly terrified on the stand. Paul Birch is the salty expert on sea matters and manners, and Steven Chase and Herbert Anderson are distinctive personalities as medical experts.

"Coriolanus"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 20, 1954

THEATER

'Coriolanus'

By WALTER F. KERR

JOHN HOUSEMAN, having coaxed Hollywood into turning out an exeellent screen treatment of "Julius Caesar," has now turned his attention to that equally political but much more neglected Shakespearian tragedy, "Coriolanus."

Mr. Houseman has joined forces with the new Phoenix Theater on Second Avenue for the three-dollar-top venture and he has illustrated the play's complex and candid examination of every kind of demagoguery with enormous clarity.

* * *

The "common herd" which grumbles and then thunders its way about patrician Rome is seen for everything that it is: resentful, loyal, courageous and cowardly. The aristocracy is given the same boldly contradictory colors—it is enormously competent and enormously vain. The self-made middlemen—those elected representatives of the people who are not above using the people—are pinned down as mercilessly, and with as little editorial comment.

In exploring the eternal clash between the rulers and the ruled, Shakespeare took no sides. Mr. Houseman has been scrupulously faithful to his author, begging sympathy for no one faction, following the psychological twists and turns for their own sake and with rueful fascination.

* * *

The director has further brought a vivid pictorial quality to any number of scenes. A row of heads rises silently over the footlights to listen to Coriolanus' grudging appeal for the people's votes, and there is steady menace in the image. There is fiery intensity in the proud man's clash with the nameless poor, and there is a striking sense of that dead calm which overtakes Rome when its arrogant military hero has been exiled.

Perhaps more evocative than any of these moments, though, is a chill night sequence in which the outcast Coriolanus, having failed to bring his own countrymen to heel, straggles forlornly into an enemy camp, willing to talk treason rather than swallow his pride. The aristocrat's grotesque reception at the hands of some bumptious servants has an aching edge of mockery to it; the lighting, movement, and hollow offstage gaiety combine to foreshadow this hero's grim ending.

The outlines of a difficult and unfamiliar play are carefully, imaginatively marked. If the evening remains an interesting rather than a genuinely gripping one it is partly due to the almost ruthless objectivity of the man who wrote it, partly to the cold, cold man who is its central

"CORIOLANUS"

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by John Houseman; settings by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Alvin Colt; music by Alex North; presented by T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton at the Phoenix Theatre, January 19, 1954. The cast:

Menenius Agrippa...Alan Napier
Caius Martius Coriolanus.....
Robert Ryan
Titus Lartius.....Lou Polan
1st Senator....Joseph Macaulay
2d Senator.....George Fells
Cominius.....Joseph Holland
Junius Brutus....John Randolph
Sicinius.....Will Geer
Volumnia.....Mildred Natwick
Virgilia.....Lori March
Gentlewoman.....Nora Dunfee
Valeria.....Paula Laurence
Tullus Aufidius.....John Emery
Lieutenant to Aufidius.....
Jamie Smith
1st Sentinel.....Michael Tolan
1st Volsian Servant...Gene Saks
2d Volsian Servant.....
Jack Klugman
3d Volsian Servant..Jerry Stiller
Son to Coriolanus..Terry Nardin

figure, partly to the fact that an otherwise excellent acting company has not yet found the music or the passion which does erupt from time to time.

Robert Ryan, tackling his first Shakespearean role, is a virile, headstrong, commanding Coriolanus. He has a vein of humor, too—he is amusingly fatuous when faced with praise—which helps quite a bit. But because his voice is patently untrained for verse he finds himself rasping the best speeches ("I banish you!") and studiously sneering his way through some which are far more filled with nuance than he makes them. The result is a performance which is visually handsome but vocally harsh, and the incessant snarl takes from this haughty intellectual any real suggestion of intellectuality.

* * *

As that imperious, shrewd, and fierce-willed mother who has borne Rome one of her most troublesome sons, Mildred Natwick is strong and sure in all of the quieter domestic passages. As she suggests to Coriolanus that 'honor and policy' may somehow be joined, as she chats hopefully with his wife about the great man he is to become, she has a luminous lyrical quality that is as endearing as it is impressive. But confronted with the tragedy's most stirring and moving tirade—this mother begs for Rome on the battlefield—Miss Natwick can only use once more the cool, firm accents of the earlier sequences. The speech is read with distinction, but it is less than deeply affecting.

John Emery's sly and treacherous Aufidius is one of the sharpest of the evening's portraits, especially good when this cautious opportunist is cagily weighing his opponent's intentions or when he is brooding over the popularity of his newfound ally. In lesser roles, Will Geer, Alan Napier, and Joseph Holland are particularly effective. Donald Oenslager's simple stone archway, surrounded by flights of circular stairs, is an eminently useful setting for the fast-moving piece, and Mr. Houseman has used it adroitly.

* * *

The production at the Phoenix does not restore a little-known play to the top shelf of the repertoire. But it does make it graphic and crystal-clear. And it gets it onto the stage, where we can look at it.

DAILY NEWS

January 20, 1954

Phoenix Theatre Does 'Coriolanus'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Phoenix Theatre, that shining and hopeful enterprise at Second Ave. and 12th St., offered last evening a large and noisy production of a large and noisy Shakespeare drama, "Coriolanus." It has been staged by John Houseman and I can see why Houseman was tempted to do it—for it was he, with Orson Welles, who managed to make something unusually melodramatic out of "Julius Caesar" many long years ago.

"Coriolanus" is as lively as an anthill under the impulse of the director, and it looks something like an anthill in the setting devised by Donald Oenslager. But ants don't yell, and actors do, alas.

Large and Willing Cast.

A formidable company of stage-struck actors have devoted themselves to this narrative of pre-Christian politics in Rome. The chief yeller is Robert Ryan, better known to the movies than to the stage, in the title role. This Coriolanus fellow is a good soldier but he isn't democratic, so the voters of Rome banish him. He falls in with John Emery, and Bob and John would have sacked Rome just to get even, were it not for the pleas of Mildred Natwick, Mr. Ryan's mother. Instead of marching on Rome, Emery kills Ryan, and I guess the modern implication of the melodrama is that democracy has been saved.

I have sought to simplify Shakespeare's plot in the foregoing paragraph—simpleton that I may be. In toto, this plot is a ring-tailed dilly and should be approached with caution. Little caution, however, is in evidence at the Phoenix Theatre. Among the many other actors caught in the fracas are Alan Napier, Will Geer, Joseph Holland (who still looks like Mussolini), Paula Laurence, John Randolph, Lou Polan, Lori March and seven actors playing 1st Citizen to 7th Citizen inclusive. They all must have been a tired crew when they finished running up and down Oenslager's stairs and leaping in and out of the orchestra pit.

And Shakespeare must have been good and tired by the time he finished writing "Coriolanus." Now I'm going to bed.

Daily Mirror

January 22, 1954

'Coriolanus' Is Rip-Roaring, Absorbing Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

For an exciting evening, we recommend the John Houseman revival of Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" at the Phoenix Theatre, Second Ave. and 12th Street. This is a rousing melodrama, stimulating and rewarding far beyond most of the season's drama fare. If it isn't one of the Bard's great plays, it is nevertheless a glorious one.

* * *

HERE IS RINGING speech, conflict, character drawing and keen insight into human motives. It has to do with Coriolanus, a noble, proud, arrogant and brilliant general, who, instead of being elected consul, is banished from Rome when he refuses to knuckle under to the people. His dignity makes it impossible for him to bare his wounds and become a sycophant.

Rebuffed by the Roman masses he joins forces with the Volscians to sack the city and revenge himself on his enemies. With victory in his grasp, his mother persuades him to relent, thus insuring a tragic end for him at the hands of the Volscians. He is a sort of Benedict Arnold.

Today, we are apt to look for the timely in plays by Shakespeare. We seek from them comparisons with situations in our own era. We often think we read into them more than Shakespeare intended, for he was first and foremost a magnificent and eminently successful dramatist.

SO, IF YOU WANT to find a message in "Coriolanus," go right ahead. As for us, we prefer to take it as rip-roaring, absorbing theatre. We believe it would be a greater play, a deeper and more touching tragedy, had Shakespeare been less cynical about the stupidity of the rabble and made his central figure less of an unbending prig.

Anyway, he has used a big canvas and vivid colors to paint a titanic study of human weakness and error. It calls for robust acting, and this it gets at the Phoenix. If the cast is not ideal, we should remember that its members are working for minimum salaries so that you may see the play at popular prices.

Robert Ryan, of the films, is making a personal sacrifice to act the title role. His voice is sharp, and his diction no better than fair. But he brings a lot of heart and feeling to his characterization. John Emery is excellent as the mean and perfidious Aufidius. Mildred Natwick is a purposeful, determined Volumnia.

WILL GEER and Joseph Randolph are effective as the demagogic tribunes of the people. Joseph Holland, Paula Lawrence, Lou Polan and Lori March do their best by other parts. But the honors of the evening must go to Alan Napier, as the patrician Menenius Agrippa. His beautiful speech and commanding stage presence are thrilling.

Donald Oenslager has designed a pedestrian set, but it does give director Houseman scope for a fluid production. And, frankly, scenery is unimportant. It just gets in the way of momentous, actionful drama.

We suggest that you stop by Luchow's for dinner before the play. The food and service are superlative. But you had better make reservations in advance, for Leonard Jan Mitchell's famous restaurant packs them in like "The Teahouse of the August Moon," "Can-Can," "The Solid Gold Cadillac" and "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!"

The New York Times
January 20, 1954

Robert Ryan Heads the Cast in One of the Rarest of Shakespeare's Plays

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Unless life starts improving enormously, New York is not likely to see for many years a performance of "Coriolanus", as good as the one that opened last evening at the Phoenix Theatre. Many better plays by Shakespeare are less well acted on the stage. For "Coriolanus" is not in the first rank of the tragedies, either in poetry or craftsmanship. Doubtless that is the reason why it has been played in New York only once since 1885.

Now John Houseman has given the text a good shaking up and staged a terse, fiery performance. Probably it is quite different from what you may have been expecting. Although Robert Ryan's Coriolanus is an egotist, snob and chucklehead, he is personable in his own way. He lacks the fatuousness that is generally assumed to be the vulnerable point in the characte.

* * *

He is as valiant a soldier as his mother thinks he is. He is modest personally. His hatred of the mob is hardly more than the one blind point in an authentic military hero. Played in this key, the story of "Coriolanus" is not the routine destruction of a tiresome boor, but the tragedy of a very human being with a mind that has never been stirred out of the commonplace. Mr. Ryan's pleasant, irrational Coriolanus who has more heart than head is an admirable piece of acting and the key to a mettlesome performance.

Mr. Houseman is an enormously able director of Shakespeare, well remembered here for the "King Lear" he staged a few seasons ago. Without straining either the text or the actors, he has molded a performance that has pace and coherence, stormy mob scenes, tender domestic scenes, a flourish or two of battle warfare and a general impression of excitement and headlong logic.

In his beautiful though simple stage scenery, Donald Oenslager, at the top of his form, has designed a notable production that surrenders detail to action. Shakespeare did not write for a stage of this kind. But Mr. Houseman and Mr. Oenslager have collaborated on a stage form that preserves the fluidity of the playwriting and perhaps adds a little variety that it is difficult to find in the text.

The actors play with remarkable insight into the contrasting natures of the people. Alan Napier's tall, gracious, good-humored Menenius has both vitality and distinction. As the lion-hearted mother to Coriolanus, Mildred Natwick, who is not a very rugged lady, nevertheless gives an extraordinary impression of courage, strength and forthright honor. When John Emery gets settled in the part of Aufidius in the second act, he, too, breaks through the conventionality of the writing and acts a warlord of some weight and stature.

Unfortunately, there is not time enough at the moment to discuss adequately the acting of Joseph Holland, as Cominius; Will Geer and John Randolph, as rabble-rousers; Paula Laurence, as a woman of sophistication, and Lori March, as a wife of loyalty and silences; Jack Bittner, as a tempestuous citizen, or Lou Polan as an amiable Roman general.

In Shakespeare's abundant career, "Coriolanus" comes toward the end of that royal succession of tragedies that included "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Julius Caesar" and "King Lear." Presumably he was exhausted by the fury of all that creation. "Coriolanus" is a tamer play; the narrative is pedestrian, the characters are not drawn with much passion and the poetry is something less than inspired. Custom and usage in the theatre have sorted out the most kingly of the Shakespeare plays. "Coriolanus" is not one of them.

But you would hardly suspect that from the enkindling performance at the Phoenix. Under Mr. Houseman's direction, "Coriolanus" seems to be a tragedy of great pith and moment. It looks like its betters.

Journal-American
January 20, 1954

Fine Revival Of Old Classic

By JOHN McCLAIN

IN the second production of its first season the Phoenix Theatre, Second ave., and 12th st., last night presented a thoughtful and facile version of Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" with Robert Ryan, John Emery and Mildred Natwick in the big parts.

Although infrequently staged in recent generations this is certainly one of The Bard's strongest and most incisive dramas and the proceedings at the Phoenix fell short of true eminence only through the miscasting of Mr. Ryan in the lead role.

This is a story of singular stature, the age-old conflict between a ruling class and the voice of Democracy, and it seemed to me that it suffered severely because of the actor's inability to transmit a sense of nobility and pride, rather than ferocity and anger to the character of Coriolanus.

Great Hero

For the very roots of the play are embedded in this interpretation of the central figure. Coriolanus returns from war a great hero, a popular aristocrat, but when the common people call upon him to aid them in a demand for more food he faces them with arrogance and tells them they have no right to be heard.

Later, when he is to be elected to the council, he once again refuses to compromise with his disdain for the populace and as a result an uprising occurs and he is banished from Rome.

This so embitters him that he seeks refuge with his mortal enemy and plots to lead the rival warriors against his own people. But on the outskirts of Rome he is visited by his mother, wife and son, who persuade him to arrange a peace.

Such a solution seems satisfactory to everybody for a short time, but it eventually strikes his old opponent as a bad deal and he is put to death by some of the soldiers he was leading.

Into this structure can be read any amount of political and social significance. As old Uncle Will wrote it I should say that he meant to let the scales balance; Coriolanus is selfish and proud and intolerant, on the other hand the people are unreasonable and ignorant and easily led. It poses a basic and yet unsolved problem.

Loud and Angry

But in the proceedings at the Phoenix little sympathy can go to the title performer. Perhaps because of inexperience in demonstrative Shakespearean roles he resorts to bellowing, as an expression of pride and strength, and one is almost immediately lined up against him. Nobody could possibly be so loud and so angry for so long.

John Houseman, a distinguished director, was in charge of the production and I think he succeeded wonderfully well in tightening the original work without limting the scope, and in maintaining a brilliant pace.

Using what amounts to a single imaginative set by Donald Oenslager he has pulled his people up out of the orchestra pit, flung them about in all directions and created a quite plausible impression of mass action in such varied locations as a Roman market place, the general's house in Corioles, a camp on the city's edge and other non-related neighborhoods.

John Emery is extremely effective as Tullus Aufidius, Ryan's rival, and exhibits the capabilities of what I believe the trade calls a voice that "projects"; Mildred Natwick, is always authoratative as the mother of Coriolanus, and Alan Napier is a tower of strength as Agrippa, the patrician.

Other bright contributions are offered by Paula Laurence, Will Geer, Joseph Holland and Lou Polan, although I was somewhat startled and amused to see John Randolph, who has lately been playing bookmakers and British cockney sailors, turn up in the part of a Tribune (you'll pardon the expression).

"Coriolanus" offers an evening well worth the ride downtown; it is a highly professional offering presented with taste, simplicity and ingenuity.

I have the greatest regard for Mr. Ryan's talents as an actor but I feel the festivities could have been improved immeasurably with a different player in the part.